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DEPT FOR AF/S - HERB TREGER

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TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV MZ ZI

SUBJECT: MOZAMBIQUE - FM SIMAO ON MUGABE AND ZIMBABWE'S

2005 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: STATE 242995

Classified By: Ambassador Helen La Lime for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Simao told the Ambassador that he believes the Zimbabwean opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) will participate in the March parliamentary elections. However, the MDC is growing weaker, several factions have emerged and some are questioning Morgan Tsvangirai's leadership. He disagreed that Zimbabwe remains

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stagnant in economic crisis; instead, "things are getting better." In any case, peace and stability are more important than democracy at this time for Zimbabwe -- a theme he repeated several times during the meeting. End summary.

2. (C) On November 18 the Ambassador delivered reftel demarche on March 2005 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe to Foreign Minister Simao. (Note: A request to meet with President Chissano on this topic is pending. end note.) The Ambassador outlined for Simao our view of Zimbabwe's difficult circumstances, including reduced trade with the region and the consequent negative impact on the Beira corridor and Mozambique's economy as a whole. She stressed that upcoming parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe, should they follow SADC guidelines, would moderate the country's political climate, improve stability, and thereby return the country to a path of prosperity. Mozambique has an important role to play in encouraging Zimbabwe's leadership to make the March elections free and fair, she told Simao.

3. (C) FM Simao responded by characterizing the USG view of Zimbabwe as "highly pessimistic." Instead, "things are getting better," he insisted. There has not been much violence lately. Inflation, which used to run as high as 600 percent per year, is now down to 200 percent. Food shortages have been overcome and food production has begun to rebound. As evidence, he pointed out that the Zimbabwean government not long ago told the World Food Program (WFP) to cease food deliveries. (Comment: In fact, we understand that in the last several days the Zimbabwean has asked the WFP for more food aid. End comment.) The Zimbabweans are paying for electricity deliveries from Cahora Bassa dam in a timely, regular manner.

4. (C) He told the Ambassador that discussions between the MDC and ZANU-PF have broken down in the past several months because dissension has fractured the MDC and there is no longer anyone with whom the government can negotiate who represents the party as a whole. According to Simao, the MDC has splintered into three groups: trade unions, farmers (who now realize that there can be no going back on land seizures) and intellectuals. Talks have been stymied because these three "cannot agree on a common platform." He said that he recently spoke with the Zimbabwean Minister of Justice, who told him that the government decided there was no value to continuing talks with MDC negotiators who do not represent the party. Describing Tsvangirai as an articulate leader with clear ideas, nevertheless he has heard that some of those around Tsvangirai are now questioning his authority.

5. (C) Still, Simao believes that the MDC will not boycott the March parliamentary elections. Tsvangirai assured several others in the Mozambican government earlier that the MDC would take part, he reported. However, the MDC would no longer contest by-elections because of recent repeated losses. The parliamentary elections will by no means be perfect, Simao repeated several times, but in his view they will be much better than the last ones. SADC will send observers.

6. (C) Throughout the hour-long meeting Simao returned again and again to stress that the Zimbabwe government must not be "pushed" to improve its behavior and, more generally, that peace and stability are "most important." "Three years ago Zimbabwe was on the brink of war," he said. And if war had come, there would have been no respect for democracy, nor human rights, and many would have been killed. "We are not pushing," he admitted. Instead, rather than risk creating enemies of its neighbors, such as happened in the case of Malawi during the civil war, at times of strain it is better to treat one's neighbors "with understanding." Some foreign NGO's are doing "more than they should," are interfering, something that occurs in Mozambique too, he added. The cost

of democracy must not be chaos, reforms must not break society. Democratic change must be gradual, in 5-10 year timeframes. "We are not in the Olympic games."

17. (C) Comment: Though the discussion focused on Zimbabwe, Simao clearly was thinking of Mozambique as well.
LA LIME